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STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL OF
INFORMATION IN AEROSPACE MEDICINE

The Matrix Approach

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The Matrix Approach

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NASA's Office of Space Medicine, working with the Lovelace Foundation, Harvard's Guggenheim Center for Aerospace Health and Safety, Bellcomm, Inc., and a number of consultants, has recently prepared a Compendium of Human Responses to the Aerospace Environment. The Compendium--over 4,000 pages, published in four volumes--is an ambitious attempt to make space medical information readily available.

When this effort was initiated some four years ago, it was decided to prepare a systematic and comprehensive approach plan to assure adequate coverage of all relevant areas and to facilitate organization of the information for easy storage and retrieval. Accordingly, a matrix was developed by G. Hoover,¹ which covers 58 environmental factors and 142 physiological-psychological functions.

The resulting 8,236 intersections have been coded by E. Roth² according to the following criteria:

- | | |
|--------|---|
| Code 0 | Empirical and theoretical factors regarding the relationship are unknown. |
| Code 1 | The environmental parameter is critical to human function in the Apollo Project. |
| Code 2 | The environmental parameter is not critical to human function in the Apollo Project but may be in future manned space projects. |
| Code 3 | The environmental parameter does not appear to be critical or applicable to human function in Apollo or in future missions. |

1. Consultant to the Lovelace Foundation, Albuquerque, New Mexico.
2. At the time, E. M. Roth was with the Lovelace Foundation.

The word "critical" is defined in the present sense as requiring quantification of human tolerance limits and optimization of the interaction in space missions.

Over a four-year period, certain advantages and limitations of the matrix approach became apparent. The matrix was found very valuable for planning a systematic effort, for checking the completeness of information, for identification of information gaps and of research requirements. Insofar as storage and retrieval of information are concerned, the matrix can serve as a locator of information. The user can request specific information such as the effect of $+G_x$ acceleration on cardiac output. Using the matrix, this can easily be extended from the environmental point of view to the effect of any type of acceleration on cardiac output; or it can be extended from a physiological point of view to the effect of $+G_x$ acceleration on the total cardiovascular system. A quick look at the matrix shows also what other factors could affect cardiac output or which physiological changes could be caused by G_x acceleration. Clearly, the matrix can be a versatile tool for definition of specific information requirement and for retrieval of information of all types and of any degree of specificity.

Originally, one of the main purposes in developing the matrix was to facilitate storage and retrieval of information. Actually, it was used to assure complete coverage of the field and to detect loopholes of information. But it was not used as an approach plan to the document, because of problems handling the immense volume of material.

Two approaches to the utilization of the matrix were considered. One would employ the Compendium as it is now. Page references would lead the user from the matrix to the relevant material in the Compendium. These page references would be inserted directly into the matrix intersections. However, some matrix intersections require many page references, while others may contain none at all, if relevant information is lacking. But the size of all intersections has to be the same, i.e., it has to be determined by the one with the greatest demand for space. This means that the size of the matrix would have to be increased considerably. An additional problem arises if the desired information covers several intersections, as some of the page references will be repetitive.

Some of these difficulties can be eliminated by organizing the Compendium in accordance with the matrix intersections. Frequently, information will have to be repeated, if it is relevant to many intersections. This system is clumsy, but excellent if the user wants specific information. If the information requirement covers a number of intersections, much of the information will be duplicated.

The traditional "Word Index" has also the problem of repetitive references when the desired information covers a wide area. In addition, the word index does not indicate other related information; it does not provide the means of narrowing the information requirement down to specific items or widening it into broader fields as it can easily be done by use of the matrix. The main advantage is "familiarity."

This state of affairs is obviously unsatisfactory. None of the current approaches to information storage and retrieval are suitable to a project like the Compendium. For the future, we have to look for a different approach and that appears to be the combination of matrix and computer. The matrix provides the organization. The information requirement can be expressed in the right terms and the scope can be defined. Computer storage of the information makes it possible to update data at any time, to increase the volume of information as required, and to retrieve information of any scope without repetition. Use of a computer also permits extension of the matrix in a third dimension. If this third dimension were "Mission Tasks," the matrix would provide an approach to information in three broad areas:

1. Effect of the environment on physiological-psychological function.
2. Effect of the environment on task performance.
3. Interaction between physiological-psychological function and task performance.

Summary - A detailed matrix was prepared as a systematical approach to the study of the "Effect of the Space Environment on Physiological-Psychological Function." The matrix is considered valuable to:

- a. check for completeness of an endeavor in this area or any given fraction of this area;
- b. adjust terminology and scope of an inquiry such that the answer will be as concise and relevant as possible; and,
- c. provide a tool for future, computer-based storage and retrieval systems in the field of aerospace medicine.

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